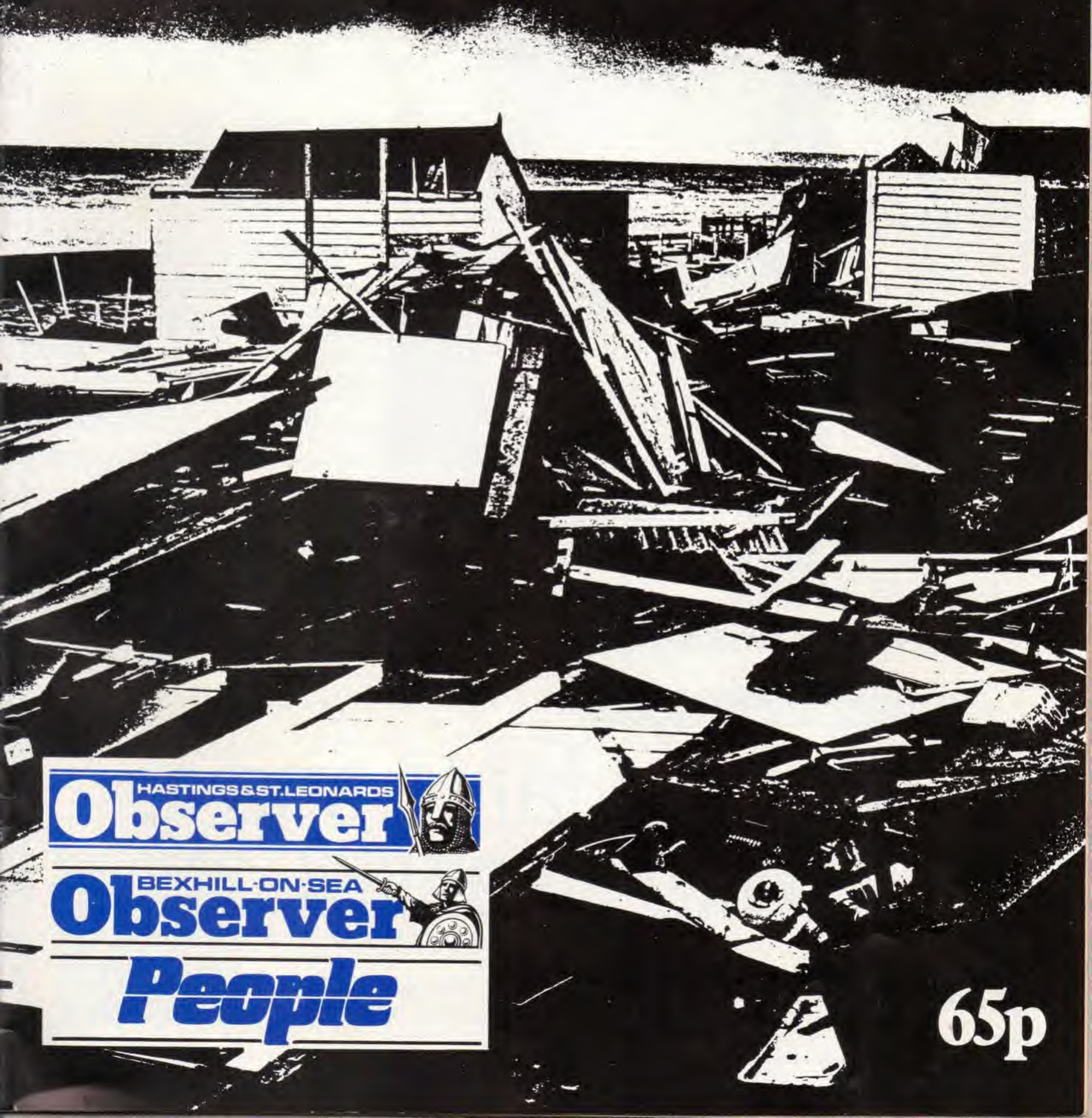


# The Great Storm of '87

- over 120 local photographs



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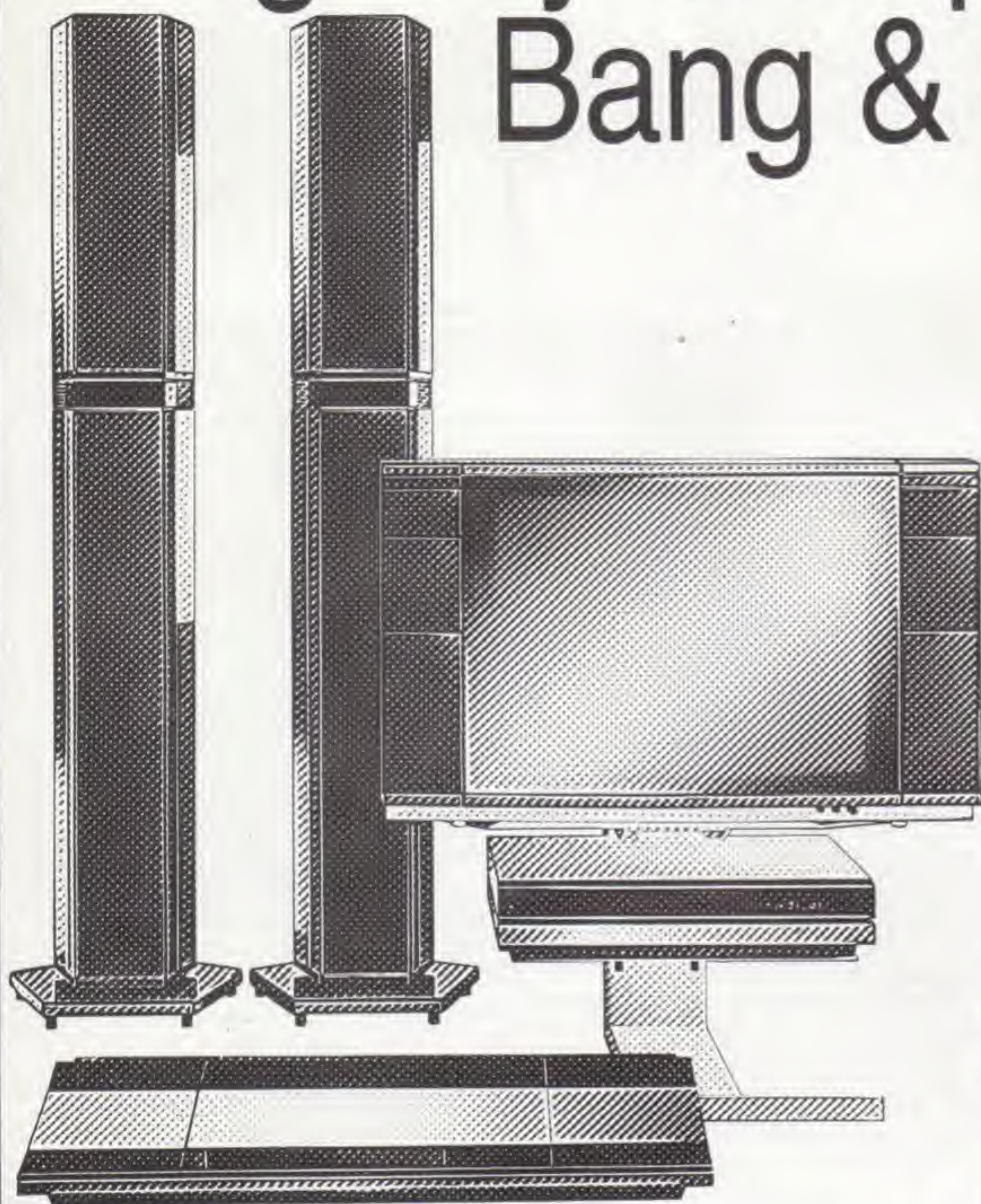


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## GREAT STORM OF '87

# Night we won't forget

THE worst storm in 250 years hit Hastings in the early hours of Friday, October 16, 1987, claiming two lives and causing millions of pounds worth of damage.

Hurricane force winds of up to 103 mph forced churches, schools and homes to bow to the will of nature.

Woodlands dating back hundreds of years were felled in a matter of hours, and buildings ripped apart without fear or favour.

As the sun rose and the winds died down, Hastings started the long and tortuous task of repairing the devastation.

Tragedy number one happened at the Queens Hotel, where the gusting winds toppled a four-ton chimney, sending it crashing through four storeys and causing up to £200,000 worth of damage.

Two guests had miraculous escapes as the massive chimney wiped out their rooms 230 and 330 before it collapsed in a pile of rubble on the ground floor.

But a third holidaymaker, 67-year-old Ronald Davies, of Warwickshire, was crushed beneath a mountain of bricks and mortar as he lay in bed.

Tragedy number two was the death of Hastings "boy ashore" Jimmy Read, when he was hit by the roof of a winch hut as he helped drag up the fishermen's boats at the height of the storm.

Mr Read, 49, of Linley Drive, died instantly, but lay undiscovered until passer-



## JANETTE GOULD tells the Hastings story

by Michael Sandover came across him hours later.

He was given a traditional fisherman's funeral, when hundreds of mourners turned out for a service at All Saints' Church, Hastings.

Then a solemn procession of mourners, headed by the Mayor, Cllr Mrs Sandie Barr, and Rector of Hastings Old Town, the Rev David Grant, followed the hearse as it wound its way down All Saints' Street.

The emergency and voluntary services leapt into action during and after the crisis, and thousands of 999 calls jammed the switchboards.

Dozens of people had to be rescued or evacuated from their storm-damaged homes, and the Falaise Hall and Isobel Blackman Centre were set up as refuges.

Thousands of homes and offices lost their electricity, and some were cut off for more than a week, sparking off pleas for emergency heating and lighting.

Telephone lines were down, and engineers had to be drafted into Hastings from all over the country to help restore the service.

Hundreds of windows and signs were smashed, and the town centre looked like a bomb site.

The spire of St Luke's United Reformed Church collapsed into the church, wrecking Gothic windows and causing an estimated £100,000 worth of damage. But the vicar, the Rev Alyn Owens, vowed to rebuild it.

Hardest hit was the borough's woodlands, with 5,000 trees felled by the hurricane force winds and a further 5,000 damaged.

Chief executive Roger Carrier estimated a bill of £250,000 to clear up the fallen trees and carry out replanting.

Roads were blocked by fallen giants, making any journey a nightmare. Council staff got to work clearing the trees off the highways at 6 am, but weeks later evidence of the storm could still be seen in a wealth of uprooted trees and the raw gleam of freshly-cut tree trunks.

Councillors called for a special dispensation from the Secretary of State for the Environment to protect the borough's remaining trees from developers.

Hundreds of chainsaws were sold throughout the area in a matter of days, and the Forestry Commission and Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation warned against attempting DIY tree surgery, for fear of injuries or deaths.

"Cowboy" builders came into the limelight, with official warnings to desperate householders not to let workmen without proper credentials carry out repairs.

Hastings Council launched its own fundraising scheme to help with the cost of replacing the trees and plants destroyed in the borough.

Government aid was offered, and condemned as "minimal."

The Government's decision to pick up 75 per cent of the bill for repairs would not help towards the costs of making good buildings, landscaping or trees, or pay for work already done by existing staff, it was pointed out.

Ratepayers quailed as they were told that East Sussex County Council was not insured, and that an estimated £10 million worth of damage countywide would have to be paid for by the district and borough councils.

● The Bexhill story — Page 6.

**PARSONS Newspapers would like to thank advertisers for their support in this special publication, as a result of which a donation will be made to a local charity. Details will be given in the Hastings Observer, Bexhill Observer and People.**

**Copies of pictures by staff photographers MICHAEL MARTIN and JIMMY BURKE may be ordered from:**

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**GREAT STORM OF '87**

A four-ton chimney crashed through four floors of the Queens Hotel, Hastings, killing a guest and opening up this skyview in a terrifying few moments.



The Mayor of Hastings, Cllr Mrs Sandie Barr, joins the traditional funeral procession following the storm death of former fisherman Jimmy Read.



A railing provides a handy barrier for brickwork and fencing at Gunters Lane, Bexhill.



A view from the top of this corner house at Linden Road, Bexhill, hit by high winds.



# GREAT STORM OF '87



The problem with trees . . . above (then clockwise) Alexandra Park takes a pounding; Sister Garrard assists with road clearance outside Nazareth House, Bexhill; a rare view of the A21; the massive tidy-up is under way.



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# GREAT STORM OF '87



The sixth-storey penthouse from which a man escaped 20 seconds before its destruction on Bexhill sea-front.

# The big blow

FOR the people of Bexhill the night of October 15-16, 1987, was like no other in local memory. It was to change the face of the town — a fate shared by a wide swathe of the South-East.

Television and radio weather forecasts had done nothing to prepare the public for what was to come.

What started as a gale in the early hours swiftly built up to a destructive force not recorded for almost 300 years.

At 4 am at Northeye Prison, Acting Senior Officer Barry Wilkinson recorded a constant 85 mph, gusting to 96 mph, on a hand-held anemometer.

Fire, police and ambulance services together with county highway departments and Rother council housing departments were quickly swamped with emergency calls.

The railway system was paralysed by fallen trees. Emergency services found roads impossibly blocked.

At the height of the hurricane-force winds, Mrs Elizabeth Elliott-Noye went into labour.

Ambulancemen were twice defeated before finding a route to her home. The five-mile journey to the Buchanan Hospital took a full hour.

The safe arrival of 7lb 14½oz Rebecca was just one miracle of that night.

That nobody died or was seriously injured was another.

By dawn Rother was trying, with social services and voluntary help, to find accommodation for over 50 homeless.

Worst hit was The Marlowes in Hastings Road and St Thomas, the West Parade flats block.

The winds tore the roof off The Marlowes. Over 40 residents were evacuated. Disabled Mr Cyril John was dragged from his bed-

## JOHN DOWLING tells the Bexhill story

room by his wife seconds before the ceiling was whisked away.

The penthouse at St Thomas was torn away. Masonry fell into the garage block. Lighter material was plastered up the Polegrove boundary with Brockley Road.

Most remarkable escape of the night was when owner Captain Mark Smith reluctantly accepted a neighbour's invitation and evacuated his sixth-storey penthouse at St Thomas, West Parade.

Twenty seconds later it had gone — blown into the Polegrove.

Dawn saw groups of neighbours gathering in growing alarm to examine the damage. Neighbours banded together. Those with gas supplies cooked breakfast for electricity users without power.

Chainsaw owners began attacking the jungle of fallen trees.

The quiet courage of many Bexhillians impressed town MP Mr Charles Wardle and his wife Lesley as they inspected the havoc.

At South Cliff pensioners Bernard and Marjorie Doddington were more concerned about their daughter's planned wedding reception at their home the following day than the fact that the roof lay entire in the roadway.

The homeless, after a night at the police station and at St Peter and St Paul School, were housed and fed at the empty Glovers Court Rother flats block.

Rother put its peacetime emergency plan into action. All available staff were put on repair or road clearance duty.

Chief technical and environmental services

officer Mr Bob Clark's staff were to deal with 300 damaged council houses in a matter of days.

With part of the auditorium roof missing, the De La Warr Pavilion theatre was put out of commission. Shows were cancelled, postponed or staged elsewhere.

Rother chief executive Mr David Powell put damage to council property at £3m — a "guestimate."

By 8.30 am on the morning of the hurricane builders, besieged by anxious householders, had run out of tiles, tarpaulins and Acrow jacks.

The MP called for tighter building control standards. Police warned of "cowboy" operators touting for roof repairs at exorbitant prices — £100 to replace three tiles at Cooden.

One insurance broker dealt with 200 damage claims in a week. An accurate total cost figure will probably never be known. In a single incident insurance loss adjusters put damage to Cllr Ivor Brampton's Beaulieu Road indoor swimming pool at over £71,000.

But the most poignant and longest-lasting scars were the town's beauty spots — Collington Wood "a job for the bulldozer," Manor Gardens "clear and plant again," in the words of a saddened parks and recreation manager Mr Colin Hudson.

Insurance claims can replace smashed homes. Time may heal the memories of a night of terror and heart-break.

But only clearance, replanting and decades of new growth can restore Bexhill's leafy loveliness.

Rother chairman Cllr Roy Pulford launched an immediate tree appeal. The only consolation — 1,000 saplings at the Broadoak Nursery, untouched by the night of havoc.



**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*Destruction at Woodsgate Place, Bexhill, and (right) an elderly resident is wheeled to safety after the roof was ripped off The Marlowes flats block at Bexhill.*



*Beach huts reduced to stickwood at South Cliff, Bexhill.*



*A section of roof ripped away at Wrestwood Road, Bexhill.*



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**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*A combination of hurricane-force winds and flooding brought havoc to Combe Haven Holiday Park, St Leonards, as this page of pictures indicates so dramatically.*



**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*A high-rise shot of part of the extensive damage to William Parker School in Parkstone Road, St Leonards. Inside the ceiling was damaged and even the floor bowed.*

*This unlucky car took the full force of a flying walkway, blown away from Eversfield Hospital in West Hill Road, St Leonards.*



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# GREAT STORM OF '87



*This page is devoted to the decimation of Alexandra Park, Hastings, where familiar views for walkers will never be the same again.*



*And then there were two.*

*The sad sight of the new criss-cross pattern.*



# GREAT STORM OF '87



Angela McEwan, 13, investigates the chimney pot that ended up outside her bedroom door at her parents house in Linden Road, Bexhill. Two tons of rubble filled the landing. Below: A chimney stack was brought down in Cooden Drive, Bexhill, punching a large hole in the roof and a bedroom ceiling.



A tricky job for this hardy trio after a giant chimney toppled on the roof of the Cricketers pub at South Terrace, Hastings.



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**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*Many acres of marshland were flooded, yet Pebsham Valley still manages to retain elements of stark natural beauty.*



# GREAT STORM OF '87



*Battered vehicles littered our towns. Above (and then clockwise): A section of Bexhill's Polegrove garages; two cars buried at Bulverhythe Road, St Leonards; caught under a tree at Wickham Avenue, Bexhill; a caravanette ends its days at Albany Road, Bexhill.*



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**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*The Manor Gardens have always been a must for visitors to Bexhill Old Town but, alas, the gardens are in a sorry state now, as these pictures indicate. The uprooted tree below is in the car park to the historic grounds.*





# GREAT STORM OF '87



*Left: Stripped of its dignity, a defiant pine stands in brutally savaged Alexandra Park. Above: Havoc of a domestic nature hits Malvern Way, Hastings.*

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# **GREAT STORM OF '87**



*That's no way to treat such a friendly rocking horse . . .*



*Pigs may fly . . . but boats? This one arrived unannounced in Bexhill's Sackville Road.*



# GREAT STORM OF '87



*Caravans in trouble at Marina, St Leonards (left) and Mount Pleasant Road, Hastings.*



*One of many no-go areas: The Ridge West the morning after the storm.*

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**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*The remains of a Vauxhall Cavalier after being crushed by falling brickwork at Boscobel Road, St Leonards. And spare a thought for one motorist who had his two cars destroyed although they were miles apart at the time.*



*Pub with no cheers: the wrecked roof of the Robert de Mortain on The Ridge.*



# GREAT STORM OF '87



*Above: A familiar sight, this one at Duncutha Road, Hastings. Left: A collapsed wall at Sedlescombe Road North, St Leonards.*



*Car in a jam at Glyne Ascent, Bexhill.*



*Serious house damage at Ninfield Road, Sidley.*

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# GREAT STORM OF '87



Advice for David Williams at B and Q: Do it yourself. Below left: Carpet shop window blown in and (right) glass problems at Chelsea Girl in Hastings town centre.





## GREAT STORM OF '87



*Furniture exposed to the elements as roof and walls disappear at The Marlowes, a flats block at Bexhill.*



*Tile and gable damage at West Hill Road, St Leonards.*



*Trying to connect you (against all odds) at Grand Parade, Hastings.*

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# GREAT STORM OF '87



First floor demolition at Gillsman's Hill, St Leonards.



A rare mulberry tree, planted in 1929 and now 70ft tall, had to be sawn up after crashing at historic Shovells in All Saints' Street, Hastings Old Town.



Archie the Goose gets a welcome-back hug from George the gardener at Gunter's Lane, Bexhill. Archie was found alive but hungry after being trapped for nine days under garden wreckage.

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Safe in mum's arms . . . 7lb 14½oz Rebecca Elizabeth, born after Mrs Elizabeth Elliott-Noye, of Leasingham Gardens, Bexhill, had gone into labour at the height of the storm. Her five-mile ambulance trip to hospital took an hour.



Making safe the fallen spire of St Luke's United Reformed Church, St Leonards. Estimated damage: £100,000



Beautiful Manor Gardens in Bexhill Old Town were decimated.

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# **GREAT STORM OF '87**



*Left: One of the oldest trees in Sidley, no longer a suitable site for May Queen dancing. Elsewhere, the sawing operation gets under way at Gillsman's Hill (above) and Ninfield Road (below).*





# GREAT STORM OF '87



Temporarily homeless, these Bexhill residents take shelter at St Peter and St Paul School.



An over-full garden at Grange Road, Hastings.



Heading south . . . down the A21.

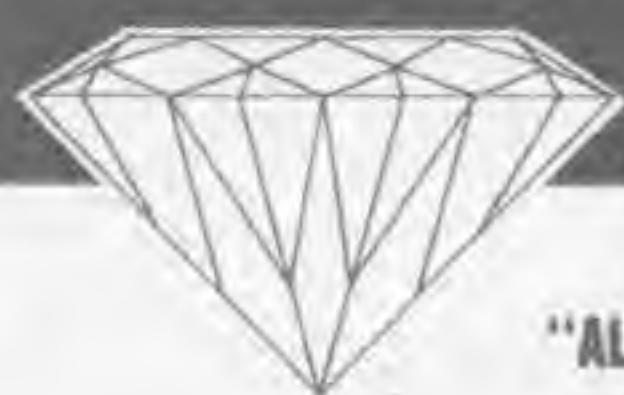


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## GREAT STORM OF '87



*A country setting but no respite from the hurricane-force winds for St Anne's House and Day Hospital on The Ridge.*



*An overhead shot of horizontal trees on The Ridge and (right) Sandrock Hall and surrounding area take a battering.*



# GREAT STORM OF '87



Left: This sulphur-crested cockatiel was found in the wreckage of a tree at Pinewoods, Bexhill, and taken to a vet. It was christened "Hurricane" and subsequently re-housed. Above: Roof destruction at Manor Road, Hastings. Below: Problems in Bexhill Old Town.



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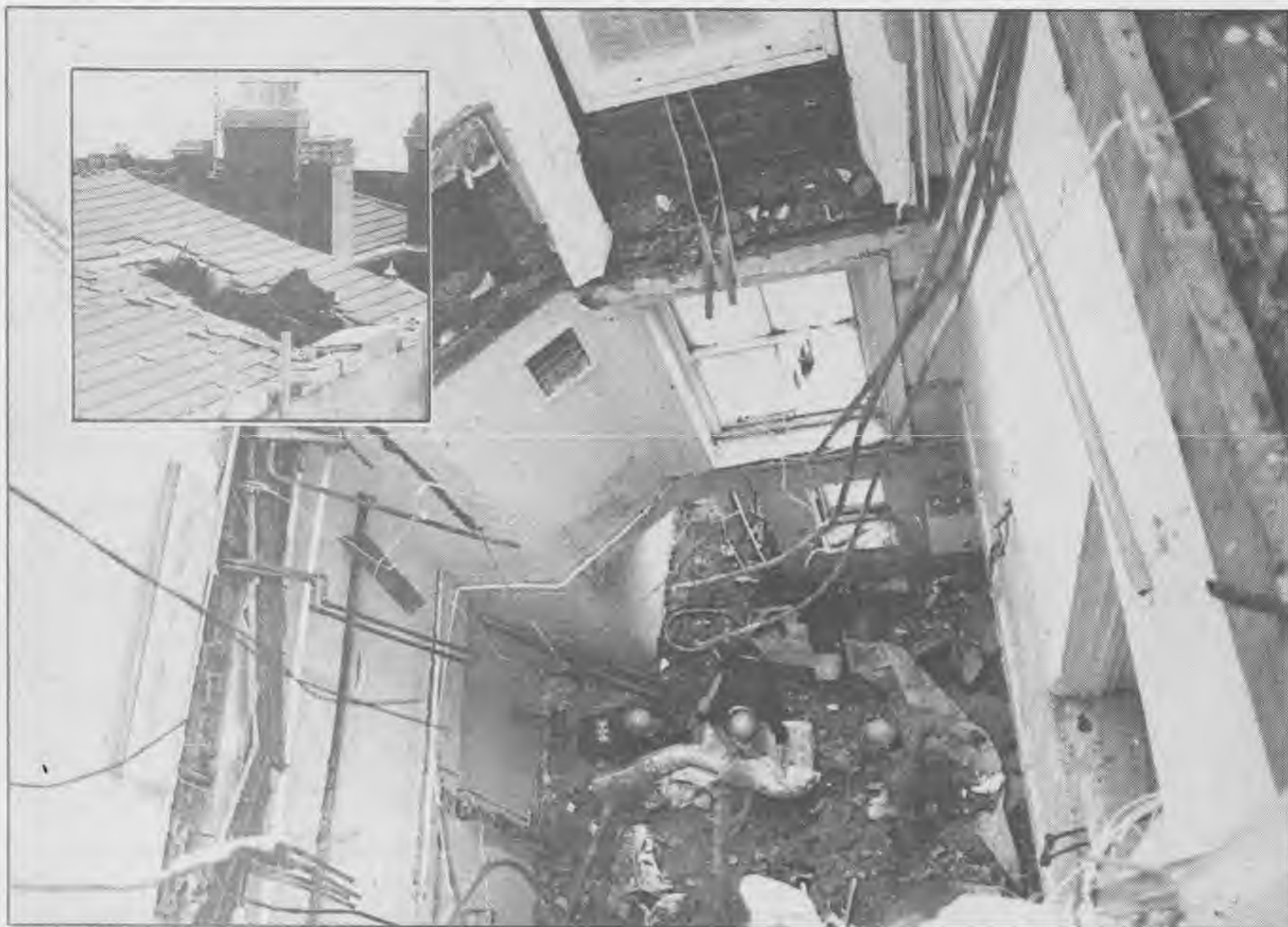
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## GREAT STORM OF '87



*Aftermath of the collapse of four floors at the Queens Hotel where a guest died. Inset: the hole left by the tumbling chimney.*



*Roots of the problem at Duncultha Road, Hastings.*



*Destruction at Undercliffe, St Leonards.*



# GREAT STORM OF '87



Left: A slanted view from the top of St Matthew's Church spire, Silverhill. Above: Two shots of repair work at Auckland House, Bexhill. Below: Entrance hazard at St Mary Magdalene's School, Bexhill.



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**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*Early morning problems on the Ninfield Road. Left: Straight down the middle, a sad sight in Alexandra Park. Below: the grounds of Hastings police station.*





**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*Unlucky parking spot at Bexhill. Left: Going down in Hastings! Right: Window blow-in at Bexhill Hospital. Below: Single lane only at The Green, St Leonards.*

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# GREAT STORM OF '87



*Crushed garages in front of Bexhill's Polegrove grandstand. Below: Chainsawing, a familiar sight. Right: British Telecom's round-the clock effort.*





**GREAT STORM OF '87**

Fireman Allan Keates who survived to tell the tale after a huge concrete parapet fell on his recently vacated car. Below: Debris from St Thomas' litters the Polegrove.



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## GREAT STORM OF '87



*Above left: Tom Voller bales out his cellar at Bexhill Road, St Leonards. Right: Re-arranged scenery in Alexandra Park. Below: Upmarket Herbrand Walk, Cooden, in tatters.*





# GREAT STORM OF '87



Blocks of flats at Bexhill — Robin Court above and The Marlowes below — were severely hit.



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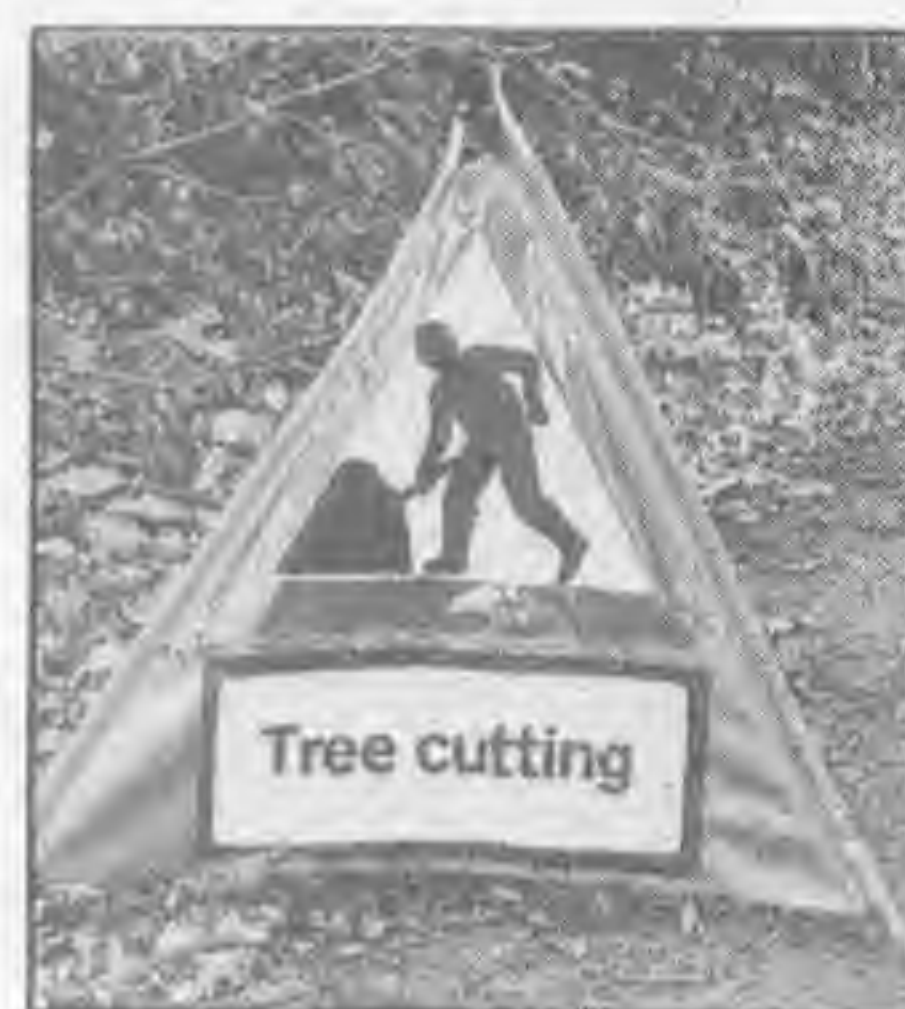
## GREAT STORM OF '87



*This friendly giant was uprooted on the Down, Bexhill.*



*Sorry, it won't fit in the boot!*



*Sign of the times.*



*The morning-after scene in Crowhurst Road.*



**GREAT STORM OF '87**

*Overturned and flooded: A double dose of disaster at Coombe Haven Holiday Park.*

*Slicing open the way ahead ... huge sections of tree trunk are removed to keep The Ridge open to traffic.*



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## GREAT STORM OF '87



*A second look at Alexandra Park. But there are no takers for the once-popular seat, pictured above.*





# GREAT STORM OF '87



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# **GREAT STORM OF '87**



*The clearing-up operation: Chainsawing trees and cutting up lamp-posts.*

*Brickwork and fencing provide plenty of work at narrow and picturesque Gunters Lane, just north of the Down at Bexhill. It was typical of the jobs faced by residents throughout the district.*





# GREAT STORM OF '87



Clearing the obstacles in Upper Maze Hill, St Leonards. Right: Surveying the havoc in Westwood Road, Bexhill. Below: Checking the new garden layout in Grange Road, Hastings. Far right: Wreckage from St Thomas' flats litters the Polegrove at Bexhill.



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## GREAT STORM OF '87



*One of the saddest sights after the Great Storm of '87: trees lie like matchsticks across the countryside.*



*The official tip set up by Rother District Council on the Down at Bexhill to burn hundreds of tons of ruthlessly destroyed trees.*



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